

**Congressman Ed Case
Hawaii Agriculture Community Survey**

Name and address (optional)

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1. What is your role in Hawai'i agriculture?

I am currently the Agricultural Specialist for the County of Maui, Office of Economic Development. I was a fulltime vegetable and fruit farmer from 1973 to 2004 and joined the County in 2004.

2. What are the greatest challenges facing Hawai'i agriculture (list in priority)?

a. Water cost and availability. On Maui the water system is well maintained but the cost to producers escalates every year. We are attempting to complete a dual water line for untreated water in Up Country Maui but the cost of the infrastructure will be very high. The pipeline is being installed in phases but a major expense of a large reservoir to service the line will be built in the current 2006-2007 budget. When you consider the water facilities and the cost of the water available to our competing farms on the West Coast, the Maui farmer is at a decided disadvantage. One of the reasons I am working for the County of Maui is that my biggest farm lot (19 acres) has a 5/8" water meter. A meter of this size limits my ability to utilize the land for intensive farming. Also, the farm land is a low elevation farm where rainfall is intermittent so I need to rely on the County water system. When I asked the County for a larger meter, I was told that if I were given the larger meter, it would affect the water supply to the other existing farmers. So my request was denied and the choice to leave farming altogether became attractive. I used to farm on another leased parcel but the owner is working on a subdivision for his family. There have been some Federal monies spent on our water infrastructure but not to the extent of our competitors. Farmers are struggling right

now and the cost and availability of water will make farming less attractive to the children of farmers or anyone attempting to farm.

- b. The threat of invasive species also deserves some notice. For many of the cattlemen in the Makawao area, Fireweed has become a large problem. If ingested in sufficient quantity, livestock can become poisoned from the toxins in the plant. The weed is spreading faster than we know how to control. The County of Maui had to spend monies to help seek a bio-control agent. This should be a State function but monies for control are scarce.

Secondly, Axis Deer on Maui has become a major problem for the low elevation farmers. Large herds of deer can destroy large areas being farmed. Many on Maui feel it is a State problem since the DLNR introduced the deer to Maui. But the State simply regulates who can hunt the deer legally. There is no control program in place and the populations and resulting problems will increase over time.

The latest in a long line of vegetable pests to make its way to Maui is the pickleworm. It is described as a major pest in North Carolina, making it difficult at times to grow cucurbits there. Once the larvae is inside of the male flower, it is very difficult to control by spraying.

I am aware of your attempt to put into place Federal inspection of produce and plants entering Hawai'i. My hope is that you will succeed in this process, but given the budgetary restraints currently being faced by the U.S. Congress, it remains doubtful that it will pass. We in County government are seeing a rise in the cost of dealing with invasive species. We are currently involved with attempting to control Banana Bunchy Top Virus, Miconia, Coqui Frogs, Wiliwili Gall Wasp, and Fireweed. Even Russian Thistle is getting established in the Pulehu area of Maui. We need a better system of determining what can be allowed into Hawai'i or the Paradise we are accustomed to seeing may disappear within a few decades.

- c. For many commodities in Hawai'i, we can no longer compete with the U. S. Mainland. An example would be beef. This is especially true in drought situations where the cost of imported feed is too great. The shipping company can ask for a rate adjustment to cover fuel price increases. But the local cattleman has to compete with the mainland

where the cost of feed is extremely low. That's why so many cattle producers ship the weaned out cattle to the U. S. Mainland. There is a chance that they can make some money. If you take a look at the livestock report from the State Statistical Branch, you can see the serious decline in beef, pork, and chicken sales within Hawai'i. We cannot compete in the commodity market for livestock. I don't know if there can be freight relief for ranchers during a drought period.

3. Where would you like our federal government to focus its efforts on behalf of Hawaii Agriculture?

- a. I would like to see Federal monies to help complete the Dual Line project in Up Country Maui. If this project can be completed, water would not have to be pumped up to the Kula Agricultural Park. Also, monies for the Moloka'i Irrigation System which is in need of several million dollars in repair. Only \$750,000 were appropriated through the last Legislative session. You can look at all of the other water systems under the State control and figure most of them are in need of repairs. Mayor Arakawa has recently proposed taking over the MIS from the State because it has demonstrated over time that it cannot take care of the system. The State Government will not allow this to happen since the MIS pays for most of the income coming into the State irrigation system.
- b. I believe, as others do, that the best way to help Hawai'i with Invasive Species is to keep them out in the first place. My hope is that all of the Islands with direct mainland or International flights can have in place a facility where newly introduced plants can be inspected thoroughly before being released into Hawai'i. Of course, it would be nice to have Federal Inspection for plants and produce from any destination where direct flights to Hawai'i are scheduled. But the inspection is very critical for freight bound for the islands. Having completed the study of plants and produce coming into Kahului Airport, shipments can be specifically targeted today for the likelihood of invasive species. It's too bad there isn't a way to reject a person's ability to ship products to the islands if he or she had at least 3 previous orders for shipment to Hawai'i rejected due to excessive levels of undesirable pests.
- c. Please continue to fight for monies to assist Research for our crops

grown in Hawai'i. If the Federal Government does not want to provide inspection of what is coming into Hawai'i, then it should at least fund monies to deal with the problems once introduced. Also, since the majority of crops in Hawai'i are considered minor crops, getting new pesticides cleared for use with these crops is needed.

4. What can I do to best assist Hawai'i agriculture?

- a. I would encourage you to continue to press the issue on establishing Federal inspection of produce and plants entering Hawaii. No matter what happens in the current Congressional session, please continue to voice the need for the inspection. It just seems that an issue such as monitoring wetlands is more important to the Federal Government than the Federal Inspection we desperately need in Hawaii.
- b. Is there any way to get funding to handle the invasive species issues that the County is currently dealing with today? Hawaii County failed in their attempt to get funding through the Forestry Division to control the Coqui frogs. Perhaps you are in a position to judge where our lobbying efforts can be focused.
- c. Any efforts on your part to secure funding for much needed irrigation repair projects here in Hawaii would be a priority for many growers.